



**IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH**

**SERIES: FACING THE FUTURE**

**TITLE: FACING THE FUTURE WITH CONFIDENCE**

**SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 16:18**

**DATE: MARCH 1, 2026**

## **INTRODUCTION**

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We are in the final week of our “Facing the Future” series. Today, we are looking at facing the future with confidence.

Pop quiz time! Can anyone remember our six previous “Facing the Future” themes? (With conviction, with dependence, in song, on message, on mission, and with purpose.)

This series has included lessons on God’s Word, prayer, worship, the gospel, missions, and discipleship. These are indeed core principles for how we should face the future as a church. Certainly, the theme of confidence is a fitting conclusion to the series. If we are practicing the six previous elements, then we have every reason to be confident in the Lord as He works among us.

In our lesson today, we are looking at one verse. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus instructs on for why we can confidently face the future.

## Text

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### Matthew 16:18

*And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

## Explanation

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### Context

At this point in Jesus' ministry, His fame is not slowing down. Because of His authoritative teaching and miracles, people were forming opinions about Him. Jesus, likely intending to make a point to His disciples, turns to them and asks, "Who do people say that I am?" The disciples reveal that the people lacked consensus. Some thought He was John the Baptist, others Elijah or Jeremiah. For the most part, the people were content with recognizing Jesus as a prophet.

After hearing the opinions circulating among the people, Jesus turns to His disciples and asks, "But who do you say that the Son of Man is?" Certainly, Jesus wants to be sure they accurately know Him. It makes sense that Jesus would measure His disciples' understanding.

Peter, as he often does, serves as the spokesperson for the disciples. He correctly answers, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." He seems to say this with confidence and certainty. Jesus is not merely a prophet; He is the fulfillment of God's promise to send the one who would save Israel. Peter is declaring that Jesus is the Son of David who will establish an everlasting kingdom (2 Sam. 7:11–16). Yet Jesus is more than a physical descendant of David. He is the Son of God—God in the flesh. Peter is certain that Jesus is divine.

Jesus confirms that Peter is correct. More than that, Jesus explains *how* Peter is correct. Flesh and blood alone cannot arrive at such a conclusion. Jesus explains that God the Father is the one who revealed this truth to him. Jesus is saying what Scripture confirms elsewhere. John 1:12–13 says, "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." Likewise, John 6:44, 63 states, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him... It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all."

## **And I tell you, you are Peter...**

As we proceed with our lesson, we want to take this verse phrase by phrase. Often in the Gospels, Jesus precedes some of His most powerful statements with phrases such as, “Truly, truly, I tell you.” When He uses this language, He is often making a significant claim about His authority and identity. This may seem like a small detail, but with the words, “And I tell you...,” we should take note of the importance of what Jesus is about to say.

We have just seen Peter make a pivotal statement about Jesus, and in return, Jesus will make a pivotal statement about Peter. Christians today likely think of Peter as Jesus’ most well-known disciple. We know him by the name “Peter” because that was the name Jesus gave him, and it is the name the New Testament writers most often use. His original name, however, was Simon.

Peter confidently professes that Jesus is the Christ, and Jesus confidently pronounces that Simon is Peter. The name Peter means “rock.” While Peter’s commitment to Jesus is evident, he admittedly does not always live up to his new name. Jesus has, of course, earned the title of Christ in the eyes of the disciples. He has borne witness about Himself through His miracles and teachings. He never sinned, and the disciples had a closer view of Jesus than anyone else. Yet it almost seems that Peter has not yet proven himself worthy of a name that means “rock.” After all, he often speaks rashly, demonstrates misunderstandings, and would even deny Jesus three times.

Despite Peter’s shortcomings, Jesus has a plan for him. Through discipleship and the eventual work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is going to make Peter into a rock.

## **On this Rock**

Various interpretations exist regarding the significance of this statement. Catholics believe that Jesus was instituting Peter as the first pope. In this view, the “rock” refers to Peter himself, and Christ builds His church specifically on Peter. The Catholic understanding of the pope is that he is the successor of Peter. While the pope himself is not considered infallible, his official teachings regarding doctrines of the faith are believed to be without error. In this view,

the pope is the human instrument of the Holy Spirit, guiding and protecting the church.<sup>1</sup>

Another common interpretation understands the “rock” not as Peter himself, but as the confession he made. In this view, Jesus promises to build His church on the bedrock confession that “Jesus is the Christ.” According to this perspective, the church’s core responsibility is to proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. This is the central message the church must never abandon. The church exists to make Christ known, to worship Christ, and to grow in relationship with Him. In other words, the church is all about Christ.

A third view falls somewhere between the first two. This third perspective recognizes the importance of professing Christ as the foundation of the church—certainly no one other than Christ can take credit for being its foundation. No individual, even Peter, can be more significant than the confession that Jesus is the Son of God. At the same time, it seems reasonable to acknowledge that Jesus affirmed Peter as a leader among the apostles. In this view, the “rock” may still refer to Peter, but without designating him as a singular pope or establishing a line of succession. Instead, Peter is viewed as a leader among equals. Among these three views, the second or third seems most preferable.

## **I will build my church**

Debates over the meaning of the “rock” may have overshadowed the importance of what Jesus says next: *Jesus will build His church*. Ultimately, it is not Peter who builds the church, but Jesus Himself. Peter is a tool; Jesus is the builder.

Jesus’ declaration is one of certainty. He is not merely predicting what will happen; He is declaring what He sovereignly and providentially will accomplish.

This is the first time the word *church* appears in the New Testament. The Greek word *ekklesia* means “called-out ones.” The first time the word appears in Acts is when a congregation of believers grew fearful after hearing reports of Ananias and Sapphira’s deaths (Acts 5:11). Over time, the word comes to refer

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dolr.org/catholicism-faq>

both to local congregations and to all believers everywhere. In this sense, all local churches together make up *the church*.

From Matthew 16:18, we see that Jesus promises to sovereignly advance His kingdom on earth through the church. Jesus knows that the Father's plan does not involve Him remaining on earth forever. He will die, rise again, and soon ascend into heaven. Yet His kingdom will not end with His departure. His mission will continue through the church, and God will use Peter and the other apostles to lead it.

### **The gates of hell shall not prevail**

In His next statement, Jesus says, "...and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." This emphasizes to the disciples that Jesus will indeed build His church. What God has determined, He will accomplish through and in the church. Not even the fiercest spiritual enemies can stand against what God plans to do in building His church.

### **Discussion Questions**

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- Does a particular interpretation of "the rock" seem appealing to you?
- In your opinion how does culture at large view the church?
- Do you feel like you get a lot out of church? For you, how has the church shaped your life in the past? And also recently?
- Do you view the church as essential for God to advance His kingdom?
- Do you view the church as essential for your own spiritual growth?
- What do you think are some of the challenges that the church in America faces today?
- Can you think of how the city of Little Rock would be different if all the churches in Little Rock ceased to exist?
- How would Little Rock be different if Immanuel ceased to exist?
- How did you end up attending church at Immanuel?

## **Conclusions or Application**

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### **FACING THE FUTURE WITH CONFIDENCE**

We know that church can be messy. Each local church is made up of people who have a bent toward sin. There will be conflicts, disagreements, and mistakes made.

Yet Jesus promised to build His church. We can face the future with confidence that God will use His church to advance His kingdom. As long as we keep the gospel message about Christ central and keep ourselves humble and obedient to God, we can trust that God will build His church.

### **HIS CHURCH**

To be clear, we are not stressing that God will build Immanuel so that Immanuel's name can be made great. Immanuel is not ultimately our church; Immanuel is Christ's church. Nor should we think that Christ's goal is to increase the reputation of the name Immanuel. Ultimately, God's goal is to increase the glory of Christ Himself. It is fair to say that the more Christ is exalted in a church, the more impact that church can make.

Our goal as a church is to submit to Christ in everything. He is our Chief Shepherd. And again, by following His commands, our church can have full confidence that the Lord will be with us and will help us advance His kingdom.